DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 537 IR 013 082

AUTHOR Fox, Elizabeth; Roncagliolo, Rafael
TITLE Obstacles to Television Reform in Latin America--A New Look at the Failures.
PUB DATE Mar 86
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the International Television Studies Conference (London, England, July 10-12, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Industry; *Commercial Television; Cultural Influences; Developing Nations; Foreign Countries; *Government Role; History; *Political Attitudes; Public Service; Socioeconomic Background; *Technological Advancement; Totalitarianism
IDENTIFIERS Development Communication; *Latin America; *Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

This paper briefly discusses television reform in five Latin American countries where media reform occurred at roughly the same time, i.e., Peru, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil. The development of television in Colombia, where no reform occurred, is compared with television development in the other countries. The main causes that gave rise to the reform movements are described as shifts in political power within the countries and the emergence of new social actors; the principal elements in the reforms are identified as the political will and economic interest to change television. It is shown that television reforms failed when their authors lost their political power, and also because of the lack of internal coherence of the reforms themselves, their deficient economic viability, and the national and international opposition to them. A number of questions are raised about the motives behind the reforms and the continuity and inevitability of the commercial growth of television. The paper also analyzes how the reforms were exploited for political gain or loss. In conclusion it is suggested that consideration be given to the possibility of a disinterested public service reform of television in Latin America and to the possible sources for implementing this reform. (CGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED294537

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Elizabeth Fox & Rafael Roncagliolo
IPAL

OBSTACLES TO TELEVISION REFORM IN LATIN AMERICA

- A NEW LOOK AT THE FAILURES -

Paper Presented to the
1986 International Television Studies Conference

IR013082

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard Paterson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION STUDIES CONFERENCE - ITSC 86 - 10/11/12
JULY 1986

OBSTACLES TO TELEVISION REFORM IN LATIN AMERICA:
A NEW LOOK AT THE FAILURES

Elizabeth Fox and Rafael Roncagliolo IPAL

When television began in Latin America in the 1950's, goverments paid for the initial infrastructure and controlled the early transmissions. Private radio owners, advertisers, and local entrepreneurs, however, were quick to realize the potential of the new technology. By the late fifties, the three main U.S. television networks, firmly established at home, were eager to expand their overseas operations. The networks, as well as U.S. advertising agencies, pharmaceutical, and mining companies, invested in the nascent private television companies of Latin America. By the early 1960's, although governments continued to subsidize television through advertising investment, infrastructure, loans and credits, and tax breaks, and many still owned the studies and transmission facilities, commercial television had become the norm.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, media reform movements began in many of the countries of Latin America, applying to television different development theories: national planning, dependency, New International Economic Order, and self reliance. Most reforms called for public control and participatory planning of television, the use of television in education and rural development, national ownership, content, and capital, and a more balanced internacional exchange of news and entertainment.

The different movements toward increased national, non-commercial, and democratic control of television took place during a period of economic growth and consolidation of the commercial operations of Latin American television. By the time the reforms occurred, the sales of U.S. programs, and U.S. advertising agencies had replaced direct U.S. ownership of Latin American television, and television had carved out for itself a significant share of the advertising market.

Neither economic growth nor the introduction of new technologies--color, satellites--seem to have given rise to the reform movements. The main causes were shifts in political power within the countries and the emergence of new social actors. In each case of reform, a new military or civilian administration sought to increase state control, national content, and the participation of different groups in the media in order to consolidate its power, and as part of its platform of political change and economic reform.

Once in power, either through elections or, in the case of Peru, a military coup, the administrations responsible for the reforms attempted to regain national and public control of television and make television part of their political, economic, educational, and cultural development programs. In every country where reform movements occurred, a newly empowered goverment drafted legislation to modify the ownership, financing, content, and programming objectives of televison.

The media reform movments met with strong national and international opposition. Critics accused their authors of trying to quiet opponents and win popular support through the manipulation of television content. Owners of private TV companies and advertising agencies protested against the limits they felt the reforms would impose on free enterprise and freedom of expression, ignoring that commercial television was by no means the norm in other regions of the world.

The reform movements followed the same general pattern. In Peru, Chile, and Venezuela, new administrations attempted to increase the role of the state in television ownership, administration and content, met with stiff opposition, and withdrew the reforms or lost political power. In Peru and Chile, reforms were enacted; in Venezuela, they were never put into law. In Mexico and Brazil, factions within the ruling party applied different forms of goverment pressure to private television. In Mexico, these pressures were by and large unsuccessful; in Brazil, under a military dictatorship, they achieved many of their objectives. In Colombia, under conditions of political stalemate, no reforms occurred.

In all the countries of the region, in spite of differences in the nature of the reform movements and the political conditions under which they were carried out, the evolution of commercial television appears to have been remarkably stable and homogeneous.

The principal element in the reforms was the political will to change television. In many countries, before the reform movements took place, the state already had sufficient means to control and operate television as a public service through advertising investment, subsidies, and existing legislation. These policy tools had not been applied earlier to television because of lack of political will and economic interest. The television reforms failed when their authors lost their political power. The internal coherence of the reforms themselves, their economic viability, and the national and international opposition to the reforms, were secondary factors in their failure.

The analysis of the successes and failures of the early attempts at television reform in Latin America, on a country by country basis, and observing the general trends in the growth of the television industry in the region, sheds new light on the obstacles to television reform in developing countries. It raises questions regarding the limitations of public control of television and the political motivations of reform.

The media reforms occurred in Latin America in five countries in roughly parallel periods: Chile (1964-1973), Brazil (1970-1978), Peru (1968-1980), Venezuela (1974-1978), and Mexico (1970-1982). The analysis of Colombia (1970-1980), where no reforms occurred, compares television development with other countries where reforms took place.

Peru, Chile, Venezuela

The military regime that ruled Peru between 1968 and 1980 modernized and expanded the Peruvian public sector and increased state presence in the economic, social, and cultural life of the country, including television. During the first year of the military regime, the government repeatedly raided and closed down newspapers and magazines and detained and deported journalists. Meanwhile, the government prepared a comprehensive media reform to stifle criticism from the opposition, counter foreign influence, create a national identity, form public opinion, and provide forms of expression to previously excluded sectors of Peruvian society while reducing the power of the private owners.

The most radical measure of the media reform was the expropriation of the national daily newspapers and the plan to turn them over to organized sectors of Peruvian society: rural cooperatives industrial workers, teachers, etc. In spite of violent protests from the private sector against state intervention, the military also expropriated 25% of the equity of certain radio stations and 51% of television stations, converting these into mixed public/private enterprises. New legislation limited media ownership to Peruvians and reduced foreign content in Peruvian media. Other legislation put radio and televison at the service of national social and economic development programs.

ENTEL-PERU, the National Telecommunications Company of Peru, managed the state controlled radio and television stations. By 1972, ENTEL controlled 3 television channels. By 1974, the Revolutionary Government of the Peruvian Armed Forces controlled and administered all the television stations under the National Information System and the Central Information Office.

In spite of the switch from private to public ownership, Peruvian radio and television content continued much the same as it had before expropriation. Television kept its fare of canned U.S. programming with little national production. Because the government did not provide public funds to finance the expropriated stations, these continued to be supported by advertising. The government appeared more interested in the political control of television than in its announced aims of development and nationalization.

After almost seven years in office, in 1975, a palace coup toppled the military president responsible for many of the media reforms. By this time, television was firmly under state control. The coup signaled a change in direction within the armed forces resulting in the modification of many of the revolutionary measures enacted during the first seven years, among these those concerning television.

In 1980, soon after elections, a civilian president returned the expropriated newspapers to their former owners and modified the

structure of public television to reflect private and commercial interests. The attempt of the revolutionary government to restructure the mass media in order to support the goals of its administration, including the access of wider sectors of Peruvian society to the mass media, had failed.

The Peruvian reforms, hailed by some as an innovative and essentially democratic scheme to harness the media for goals of national development and popular participation, were harshly criticized by the private media as contrary to the principles of freedom of expression and the press. In spite of initial support from many intellectuals and journalists, the measures were generally considered undemocratic and authoritarian, and, in the case of television, produced no real changes in content or style. The reforms raise questions regarding the ability of the government to bring about participation in the media in a top down manner, as well as the possibility of effecting reform without changing the economic base of the media, in this case advertising.

When television first came to Chile, the country was fast becoming sharply polarized. It was increasingly difficult for rival political parties to reach agreements, and state intervention was viewed with growing distrust. The universities alone were considered non-political, and, although a tradition of private radio was already firmly entrenched in the country, the Chilean universities were assigned the legal administration of television. By 1963, when television's experimental phase was

over, the directors of the university channels found themselves unable to fill all the available airtime with educational and cultural productions. In the absence of state subsidies or specific policy guidelines, the university channels soon gave in to commercial pressure from advertisers to buy airtime, and a barrage of cheap, imported programs.

As the different political parties attempted to lure new voters with promises of political and economic change, the power of the media, especially television, to reach voters and influence opinions grew and the control of television became more political contentious. In 1964, the Christian Democrats came to power on a program of agrarian and social reform and modernization. The media were an important part of their program of grassroot mobilization and integration of new social actors as both consumers and producers of culture. The number of television receivers increased drastically under the Christian Democrats.

In 1970, in the face of immense opposition from the other parties, yet certain that they would remain in power to extend their wider reforms to television, the Christian Democrats set up a national government owned and operated television channel outside the jurisdiction of the universities. That same year, however, in a close election, a left-wing coalition came to power, and threw television into a radically different political conflict.

In a complex political alliance, Salavador Allende, the president for the left-wing coalition Unidad Popular, took office, after having agreed to legislation whereby his government could make no changes in the existing television system, including the university channels. The new legislation mitigated the power of the executive over the national television system, assigned parliament the power to change ownership and media legislation, and guaranteed the continuation of the independent university channels.

The Unidad Popular gave first priority to the rapid expansion of state control of industry and agriculture and an immediate increase in the living standards and the political participation of low income groups. It did not and could not change television policies, although the radical change of media ownership had been part of its program, and some members supported a cooperative ownership of the media and strove to influence and control the mass media, convinced of the important role these played in the formation of a new culture and in the education of the people.

Further opposition-backed legislation broke the government's monopoly on television in 1971 and gave anyone the right to set up new channels in any univeristy. The struggle to control television spread to the university channels. The opposition gained control of the Catholic University channel and later, after first setting up its own channel, gained control of the main channel of the University of Chile. Meanwhile, the opposition continued to attack the national television channel

by voting against its budget and protesting political manipulation by the Unidad Popular.

In September 1973, the military toppled the government of Salavador Allende, and swiftly placed military directors in all television channels. The bitter struggle for television reform, that had begun as a movement to extend political, social and economic reform to television, ended as a fight to control television in order to change the government.

In Venezuela, private, commercial television grew quickly after the departure of the military in 1958 and during a succession of democratically elected regimes. By 1974, when the opposition candidate, Carlos Andres Perez, became president, private commercial television had become a highly concentrated and important economic force.

Under Perez, the Venezuelan public sector, newly rich with earnings from petroleum exports, began to expand its activities into wide areas of social and economic development, including the mass media and culture. The Perez administration set up a high-level commission with representatives of many sectors of Venezuelan society in order to rationalize state expenditures in radio and television, reorganize public administration of cultural institutions, and meet the information, educational, and entertainment needs of the population. One of the results was a Project on Venezuelan Radio and Television, RATELVE.

RATELVE was mainly the product of communication researchers, with the participation of representatives of the public sector, the armed forces, the Catholic Church, the labor unions, and other social organizations. It met with enormous opposition from private television owners and operators, as well as from rival political parties that questioned the right of the state to include television in the same category as education, the theater or folkcrafts, and place it under the aegis of a national cultural policy.

Venezuela had been a founding member of OPEC, and, in the 1970's, was an active memeber of the Non-Aligned Movement. Many of the television reforms proposed by the Perez administration regarding a more balanced international exhange of news, entertainment, and culture were based on the tenets of the New International Information Order, supported, among other, by the Non-Aligned Movement. The Perez administration worked closely with the planning and research activities of UNESCO for the elaboration of national communication policies.

The Perez reforms never became law, although they were the subject of intense national debate. The Perez administration abandoned the proposed reforms, along with proposed laws to regulate advertising and the national film industry, and, soon after, shortly before losing the next presidential elections, strengthened private broadcasting with a new licensing law.

The Venezuelan reforms raise a number of questions regarding the political and economic restraints on media reform in Latin America. It would appear that because of its economic strength, private television was able to effectively confront the move towards public control in spite of its heavy dependence on government subsidies and advertising investment. As elections approached, the rival political party seems to have played an important role in the defeat of the television reforms of the Perez administration by offering to support the private media in their struggle against the government.

Mexico and Brazil

In Mexico and Brazil, an informal association between state and private capital, under relatively stable political conditions, favored the development of very particular private television monopolies: TELEVISA in Mexico and O Globo in Brazil. Mexico and Brazil are the only two Latin American countries that have developed important private national television systems covering practically their entire territories and with strong regional and international programming export activities. TELEVISA, Mexico, has become a transnational corporation, controlling an important segment of the Spanish speaking television market in the United States, while O GLOBO is one of the largest exporters of television programs in the world.

In the 1970's, and without the emergence of new political actors,

television reform movements took place en both countries. These reforms contained some of the same elements present in the reforms in Peru, Chile, and Venezuela: increased role of the state in programming and content, more national content, and greater participation in and access of the population to television. The reforms were, at the same time, radically different. In Mexico, the reforms were a late and basically unsuccessful attempt by the one-party state out of political necessity to control private commercial television. In Brazil, the reforms were the successful result of the economic and political development program of a military dictatorship. In both countries, as in the case of Peru, Chile, and Venezuela, the ultimate winner was the private sector.

Mexican broadcasting, born in the 1920's at the time of the Mexican revolution and the formation of the Mexican political system as it is today, has always been private, and, initially, strongly based on foreign capital. Until 1960, when the present Federal Broadcasting Law was passed, government regulation of radio and television did not go beyond licensing and aided the commercial development of television by means of loans, tax benefits, and labor legislation.

In the early 1970's, President Echevarria, anxious to use television to regain the support and legitimacy among workers and students that had been damanged by repression and economic change, began a series of activities to increase government presence in the private channels. These included threats to

nationalize television, public criticism of the content of commercial television, an arrangement to acquire access time on the private channels, the purchase of a government television channel, and alliances with the workers of the private television channels. In response, the two main private television networks, Telesistema Mexicana and Television Independiente de Mexico, merged to form TELEVISA.

The government's announced aims to reform commercial television to comply with national educational and economic development programs, and their efforts to structure a coherent government presence in television failed as a result of enormous opposition from private industry and splits within the government itself regarding the convenience of the reforms.

In 1977, the Lopez Portillo administration included in a constitutional reform a phrase stating that the government would guarantee a "right to information". This right contemplated the participation of wide sectors of society in the mass media and restrictions on the commercialization of the media. The government carried out consultations with many sectors of Mexican society regarding the reglementation of the new right. Private television owners vigorously opposed the proposed reglementation of the right to information, and it was eventually abandoned by the government.

During the 1970's, in the course of the proposed reforms, the

private sector hardened its opposition against any state-oriented reform of television, and moved away from the government and towards a more independent position closer to international and national industries, commerce, and advertising.

By the time the Mexican government needed to use television for its own ends and attempted to carry out television reforms, it was too late. In spite of the absence of any organized political opposition, the government was unable to carry out the reforms and faced internal divisions on its own communication policy. Private television, by becoming a monopoly and forming alliances with the other private media and advertisers, was able to resist the reforms and entered into a period of sustained national and international growth. However, once the threat of government intervention was removed, private television undertook some of the reforms of content on its own, and, in some cases, applied television to development programs.

In Brazil, the O Globo System, the largest private television company, was born with the dictatorship that took over the country in 1964. In 1965, O Globo entered the field of television, and later, when the administration of General Medici (1970-1974) designated telecommunications an area of national security, consolidated its commercial operations with the help of the government.

EMBRATEL, the state-owned telecommunications company, set up and paid for the infrastructure that made it possible for TV Globo to

broadcast nationally to millions of viewers. The government financed a low interest loan program to purchase television receivers, and contributed significantly to the commercial development of television with advertising from government instituitons and government-owned coporations and services. With the knowledge of the goverment, and in spite of their illegality, Time-Life had sizable investments in TV Globo until 1969, contributing to its the high technical quality and sophisticated network operation.

During most of the dictatorship, TV Globo was an important element in the control and manipulation of the Brazilian population by the military, giving good coverage of the accomplishments of the military regime and exploiting national patriotism. Television played an important role in the governments economic policy by accelerating the circulation of capital, the formation of monopolies, and foreign investment as the dominant pattern of economic development.

The military government tightly controlled communications and especially news. After 1967, all services, including telephones and the post, were centralized in the Ministry of Communications under a policy of integration of the national territory and installation of highly development communication infrastructure. The military considered the media, and especially television, an important tool to form national identity and communicate its plans and messages to the people.

The Brazilian government strongly encourgaged national production of programs and the reduction of violence on television. These measure did not hamper the commercial success of O Globo. TV Globo, with 43 channels, grew to become the fourth largest television network in the world, covering 3050 of the 4000 Brazilian municipalities and reaching 95% of the 17 million households with television. TV Globo produces 90% of its own programming and is the third largest exporter of television programs in the world. The Globo System owns one of the most influential newspapers in the country, O Globo, as well as a major chain of radio stations, and a publishing house.

Both TELEVISA and O Globo were able to achieve some of the goals of the television reforms that failed in the other countries of the region--namely an increase in national content of television and the integration of a national television service. During most of the military regime, O GLobo obediently followed the goals of national development and security set out by the government, in part because it owed much of its existence to government subsidies. This was not the case of TELEVISA that developed as a parallel, but not opposition power to the government.

Colombia

No reforms occurred during the 1970's in Colombian television, introduced in 1954 by a military regime under the Office of the President. A coalition of the two traditional political parties

replaced the military regime in 1957 with an agreement to share power for the next 20 years. Television developed commercially under the civilian government, becoming a public-private hybrid. The government owns the studios and transmission facilities and rents time on its channels to private companies to fill with programs and sell to advertising agencies. The state maintains control over television news by giving the same amount of new time to each of the two political parties.

During the 1970's, congressmen and representatives of provincial cities interested in a regional voice in television, businessmen eager to get a share of television time, and intellecuals, defending national culture and the educational use of television, pressured the government for reform. Some called for the complete privatization of television, others demanded greater regional autonomy over the three national channels, new producers demanded access to television time. Few if any of the demands met with success, and no significant reform movement occurred.

Each of the other cases of reform had been initiated by a government in power in order to achieve some change in the private television system, or had been carried out by private television in response to attempted goverment reform. In Colombia, it appears that no group within the government felt it necessary to change television and that the ruling politicial parties could reach agreements on television management between themselves without recourse to threats or legislation.

This brief description of television reform in Latin American television opens up more questions than it answers. It attempts to bring together television reforms that occurred at roughly the same time and ask why these took place and why they failed (If they did fail).

It raises questions about the motives behind the reforms and the continuity and inevitability of the commercial growth of television, and analyzes how the reforms were exploited for political gain, or, in some cases, loss.

In conclusion, one might ask if a disinterested public service reform of television is possible in Latin America, and, if so, where might it come from?

March, 1986